2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Native Authority, to the Native Authority, and eventually to the District Commissioner if the case is one which he will countenance. In practice, most cases reach the chief and go no further. Most people accept his decision. Thus the chief has important judicial functions.

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The Chief as his People's Representative

In special situations where the welfare of the chiefdom as a whole has been endangered by an infringement of the mores, the chief may take action. For example, a chief prosecutes a village headman who allows a woman in his village to bear her first child before she has been through the *litiwo* ceremony. Every woman who becomes pregnant for the first time must undergo this ceremony, during which she is instructed in child welfare and child care. If she bears a child without undergoing the ceremony, she is said to have 'spoilt the country' (*ajalwice cilambo*), in the sense that she has besmirched its reputation.[1]

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Chiefs usually call in magicians 'to smell out' those responsible for keeping back the rain.[2] When the rains fail as they did in 1948–9, their failure is held to be due to the magic of some evilly disposed person. It then becomes the chief's duty to call in a magician to indicate who this person is. The fees for this duty are paid by the chief himself on behalf of his people.

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The chief also acts as a representative of his people when they are affected as a whole. For example, Nyambi called in a magician after man-eating lions had taken some of his subjects. This magician called for the hearth-stones and domestic utensils from all the villages in the area, and built them up into a pyramid over which he made some anti-lion medicine. This was to clear the whole chiefdom of man-eating lions.

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Nowadays, the chief's representation of his people is seen most clearly in his position in the Administrative framework.[3] The chief represents the Administration to his people since they approach it through him. At the same time the Administration clearly treats him as the representative of his people and consults

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[1] I was told in Mponda's area that the women undergo this ceremony *after* the birth of the child, but that it is still obligatory.

[2] *Kutowa ulo*—lit. 'to tie or bind the rain', in the sense of to make it a prisoner.

[3] I have dealt with this aspect more fully in 'The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland'.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

brother, is called *anyene mbumba*, or 'the warden of the sorority-group'. As one would expect among a matrilineal people, the link between a man and his mother and sisters is strong. But it is the link with his sister that is strongest. She relies on him for protection, particularly when she becomes ill, but also in her relationships with her husband. Her brother will be her junior marriage surety, and he will give the consent which will allow a man to marry her. Also a woman's brother will have to consult the diviner and find the medicines when she or her children sicken. In times of distress, as, for example, if her crops have failed, she will appeal to her brother for help. Similarly the man is dependent on his sister in a number of subtle ways. He can always rely on her for hospitality, and is able to get a meal from her if he needs it. But his dependence on his sisters for prestige is much more important. The significance of this will emerge when we see the *mbumba* organization in the light of the segmentation and fusion of the lineage. A man can only found a new village if he has the full support of his sisters. A sister also plays a most important rôle at the birth of his children. She represents him both at the first foetal-quickening ceremony and at the birth of his child, when she listens to the birth-pang confessions of his wife.[1]

At the same time the relations of sister and brother are restricted by custom. A man must never appear too familiar with his sister, especially in sexual matters. He may not, for example, sleep in the same hut as she does; if she is away and he sleeps in her empty hut he must not make his bed in the place where she usually sleeps. He may not even sit on her sleeping mat. Authentic cases of incest with a sister are extremely rare, whereas I recorded three or four cases of father-daughter incest while I was in the field. Supposed cases of brother-sister incest are recounted and discussed widely. This is understandable because a man who is suspiciously familiar with his sister is suspected of being a sorcerer, since it is widely believed that a sorcerer usually obtains the power that he needs for the performance of his dire deeds by sleeping with his sister. The riddle of the initiands—'What is the sweetest fruit which may not be tasted?' Answer, 'Your sister'—neatly reflects the attitude of the Yao.

The close link of brother and sister is also reflected in the

[1] The significance of this is explained in Chap. VII, p. 183.

A man leaving his village on some expedition and wishing to be assured of safe conduct will procure some millet flour. Going quietly into his house, he squats down in one corner and gently sifts the flour through his hand so that it falls on the floor in the form of a little cone, repeating as he does so, his prayer for safe conduct beginning and ending with the word *shemba! phasa!*

"*Shemba! shemba!* [539] *mu-ka-mukuya mulaji nkunyaga mone ponga ndimone*
"Please, please! those at above ancestor show eyes mine that I may see
kinda, ngenda 'shonse kunyaga, shemba! shemba! shemwanda!"
the path, may I arrive well where I go, please, please, please!"

He then covers the cone of flour with a basket. On the morrow, he will uncover it to see what has happened. According as the cone has remained intact or has fallen to one side or the other, the cone indicates whether or not the journey should be undertaken, the question being vexed by the spirits to whom his supplication was addressed.

Again, there may have occurred much sickness in a village and the people conclude that the pest has come to remind them that they have not been attentive to their deceased chief. "His grave-house in the village has been allowed to fall into decay," and so on. They will decide that his spirit must be propitiated. The grave-house is rebuilt, a pot is sunk in the ground, and beer is poured in, and round about heaps of flour are placed. Prayer is made to the chief at whose grave they are worshipping, supplicating him in person and "all others who are with you at *Milanga*," asking that he will no longer cause ill to befall the village.

When a village is moved, the beer-pot from the grave of the old chief is taken to the new village and a ceremony similar to that just described takes place, with the prayer that he will come to the new village and continue to exercise his benevolent care over his people.

In 1909 when there was a threatened famine on account of long drought in Bemba district, Malenga decided that supplication for rain must be made to the spirits of his illustrious predecessors. Kanenga, one of Malenga's wise men, acted as high priest. A large amount of beer was brewed and the night before the ceremony, twenty sheep and fifty goats were slaughtered. Plates of the meat, of rice and porridge were then placed on the ground round the grave-house of the old Malenga, and pots of beer set into the ground at intervals. At the head of the grave, little heaps of *mbepesi* flour were arranged. This flour had been prepared by each of Malenga's wives as soon as she left her menstrual period. The following morning, a fence was built round the grave, outside which all the people collected, while beyond them again was a second fence. Kanenga, accompanied by an assistant then appeared, and amid absolute silence entered the inner enclosure. He addressed the old Malenga, at whose grave they were all assembled, a prayer for rain. He then repeated the prayer, invoking the aid of all the past line of chiefs down to the reigning Malenga, repeating their names. Returning to the outer enclosure, he again uttered the prayers, all the assembled multitude repeating them after him while lying face down, resting on their [514]

3: Stanton D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

knees and elbows, at intervals swaying their bodies from side to side and clapping their hands. Kasungu then ordered all to go and bathe, men and women separately. As they returned from the stream, rain began to fall.

Intercession on behalf of the sick may be made, especially by anyone who is likely to be accused of causing the illness by witchcraft.[1] The man standing with arms outstretched, downwards and a little in front of his body, the hands supine, takes some water in his mouth and discharges it in a stream on the ground, (probably as a sign of purification of his tongue), and then invoking "all the spirits above," asks that they will intercede to restore health to the sick man and bear witness to his own innocence of any wish to do the sick man injury. *Ku-pepa* is the word meaning to offer sacrifice and prayer.

Harvesting and hunting are occasions when sacrifices may be offered. It was formerly the custom for the chief to determine the day on which harvesting of millet should begin. On the day appointed, a big drum was beaten in the village and word passed round; then everyone would go down to his garden, gather a load of millet, and bring it back to the village where it was all handed over to the chief's household. After drying and thrashing, a little of the grain was laid at the grave of an old chief by one of the reigning chief's advisers, the remainder being again distributed to all the people gathered together in the village meeting-place, who ate it raw. After this ceremony, harvesting began.

In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a branch or two and reverently lays one at the foot of a *muwe* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *muwe*, she gives the rest to the child.

When a hunting expedition makes its first killing, part of the flesh of the animal is laid at the base of a tree as a thank offering to the spirits and in anticipation of further larges to be conferred. All such offerings are supposed by the natives to be partaken of by the spirits, though they are well aware that they do not actually diminish in quantity. There is an interesting point in this connection: any man who has acted as *mbiki* (undertaker) to some well-known man may appropriate these offerings. In the case of the hunting offering, he will run round the tree, saying, "I am a hyaena, the spirits will not mind me," and will then take part of the flesh-offering and eat it.

In the same way, a *mbiki* may drink from a grave hero-pot after three days, when the spirits are supposed to have taken what they want.

With the exception of the *muwe* tree above mentioned (*mkiwa*, Chin.), and possibly another called *mchi-nyama* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by *mwani*, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred.[2] The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may

[1] Vide supra, p. 307. [2] The natives of British Central Africa, op. cit., p. 46.